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STATE FOR PM AND EUR/NB- KATHERINE GARRY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/01/2017

TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL I2 EN

SUBJECT: SURVEY OF IRAQ DEPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

REF: SECSTATE 150164

Classified By: DCM Karen Decker for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

(C) 1. The Government of Estonia (GOE) is unlikely to continue to commit combat troops to Iraq after 2008 absent a United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR). With respect to the four proposed scenarios in reftel, Post is not aware of any examples of similar action taken by the host country. In addition, all previous decisions made by the GOE on Iraq deployment have been drafted by the cabinet and required parliamentary approval. As such, Post would need to engage Foreign Ministry lawyers before offering a more authoritative answer to these questions. Post estimates that the GOE will require a time frame of at least weeks, more likely months, to take action on any of the reftel proposals.

¶2. (C) The GOE and Estonian parliament have consistently linked Estonia's ongoing participation in Iraq to renewal of UNSC authorization. The linkage is specifically cited in the Government's coalition agreement. The GOE does not believe it can justify participation in Iraq politically without an UNSCR. The Parliament is currently preparing to debate extension of Estonia's military mission in Iraq through ¶2008. As in previous years, the final parliamentary vote on extending Estonia's Iraq mandate until the end of 2008 is predicated on passage of a new UNSCR. (Refs B and C)

¶3. (C) Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and Foreign Minister Urmas Paet have continued to affirm publicly that Estonian troops will remain in Iraq as long as they are needed. The GOE clearly links its internal security with its commitment to support difficult operations abroad. GOE officials have told us they believe the support Estonia received from the United States in the wake of the Russian response to the Bronze Soldier riots was a direct result of Estonia's willingness to support dangerous combat operations in Iraq and elsewhere with no national caveats. However, the Iraq war remains unpopular with the Estonian public. Although the next election cycle in Estonia is not until 2009, it is likely that politicians will not want their stance on involvement in Iraq (absent a UNSCR) to become a central campaign topic.

¶4. (C) Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo recently made statements to the press indicating that Estonia could end its mission in Iraq in 2008 (Ref B). We believe this statement was driven primarily by staffing concerns and not by political considerations. The GOE currently has almost 8 percent of its land forces deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Lebanon. Starting in January 2008, Estonian will provide 55 troops to the EU Nordic Battle

Group. Estonia has also committed to provide 250 soldiers to support the NATO Response Force (NRF-14) in 2010. Absent significant structural changes within the Estonian Defense Forces, it is highly unlikely that the GOE will have enough soldiers to staff all of these commitments. If forced to make a decision on which mission from which to withdraw, it is post's opinion that Iraq would be the first mission the GOE would draw down. Estonian Defense Forces interlocutors have argued that, in the strictly tactical sense, pulling a platoon out of Iraq is would have less of a negative impact than pulling a company out of combat operations in Afghanistan. MOD interlocutors have told us, however, that even if the GOE withdraws combat troops from Iraq, the GOE may seek to remain engaged in Iraq by committing more staff officers in support of the NATO training mission.

¶5. (C) The one caveat to the above is that the Estonian military places an extremely high value on the experience they are gaining in Iraq. Unlike the other missions in which the Estonians participate, the mission in Iraq affords them the opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with American troops. Even though the GOE has identified Afghanistan as its priority mission, some senior members of the Estonian military are worried that after Iraq, there will not be any opportunities to work as closely with U.S. forces. This sentiment would likely be taken into account if the GOE is faced with one of the scenarios outlined in reftel.

PHILLIPS